

Testimony of The Trust for Public Land  
USDA Farm Bill Forum  
Berlin, CT  
October 1, 2005

The Trust for Public Land is a national non-profit conservation organization with offices in 27 states, including one here in Connecticut. Our mission is to preserve the recreational, agricultural, and open space value of land for the benefit of private citizens, local communities and the public. We achieve this goal by partnering with states, counties and towns as well as other non-profits and, of course, the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) through the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP). Over the last four years, TPL has successfully completed or is in the process of completing over 25 FRPP projects across the nation, including 13 in New England.

We would like to express our appreciation to you, Under Secretary Rey, and to the NRCS for your consistent support for the FRPP over the last four years. Nationally, the infusion of relatively consistent levels of federal farm and ranch land protection funds has leveraged more than two and a half times that amount in state, local, and private funding. Through this process, a uniquely American way of life has been protected and important agricultural lands have been conserved. Thank you for this important and consistent support, which we hope will be carried over into the next Farm Bill.

I'd like to take this opportunity to highlight an ongoing project to protect Valley Farm here in Woodstock, CT, that illustrates the way FRPP funds can be leveraged by New England's agricultural communities to help maintain their viability. This project is representative of many of the farm protection projects TPL works on here in the Northeast and provides an excellent example of the benefits to be derived from the availability of FRPP funds.

The traditional agricultural base of northeast Connecticut has managed to remain viable in the face of a number of trends that have made the economics of farming in the region increasingly difficult. As towns in the region have watched their farming communities shrink, many have looked for ways to provide tangible support to farmers who wish to continue their agricultural enterprise and who contribute to the local economy. The Town of Woodstock, for example, has appropriated local tax dollars to a land acquisition fund for the purchase of development rights on prime agricultural land. The funds that a small community, like Woodstock, with a population of under 2500 people is able to bring to bear for agricultural preservation, while critical, are not enough on their own to meet the demand. For example, the value of the development rights on the 100 acre Valley Farm alone are estimated at \$800,000, and real estate prices in this area continue to rise. Therefore, the success of the Valley Farm project is dependant upon a successful funding partnership between the NRCS, the State Dept of Agriculture and the Town of Woodstock, with TPL providing the necessary support in the interim.

The Valley Farm project is the perfect example of how the impact of NRCS funds is multiplied by leveraging state and local dollars. Without NRCS funds, the successful

completion of the Valley Farm project would be in doubt. On the other hand, because FRPP funds have been made available, the Town of Woodstock is highly likely to achieve one of its top priority conservation objectives. Among other things, the FRPP funds will be leveraged to help realize the following benefits:

- The imminent risk of development which had resulted from a change in farm ownership will be removed and a key farm parcel will be permanently protected
- Valley Farm soils, which are classified at over 90% Prime Farmland or Soils of Statewide Significance, will be preserved for agricultural use
- Fragmentation will be prevented in the heart of the region's agricultural landscape, which consists of over 1000 acres of active farmland in Windham County alone
- A key agricultural resource will be kept available to local farms – Valley Farm's tillage is currently leased by several local farmers who rely on its continued availability to produce silage and hay for their dairy herds
- Valley Farm will remain a viable agricultural enterprise by making it affordable to purchasers who wish to carry on the farming operation
- The historic and cultural significance of Valley Farm, which has been kept in continuous operation by 4 generations of the Eddy family, will be preserved and it will continue to enhance the traditional working landscape of Woodstock, a farming community incorporated in 1686.
- Woodstock's traditional rural landscape will be protected from the radical alteration resulting from residential development of Valley Farm, which lies at the highly visible intersection of two main roads.

I would like to thank the NRCS for their contribution to the Valley Farm project, and for providing TPL with this opportunity to use Valley Farm to illustrate the many benefits that the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program brings to small agricultural communities such as Woodstock. New England communities in particular offer many opportunities to protect farms that contain both historical and cultural resources. Unfortunately, FRPP funds available for use in New England are not nearly enough to meet demand. In Connecticut alone, 9 excellent farm preservation projects went unfunded in 2005. Fewer than 370,000 acres of farmland remain in Connecticut which continues to lose farmland at a rate of 7-9,000 acres a day, one of the fastest rates in the nation. In Connecticut and across the nation, TPL cannot overemphasize the importance of programs such as FRPP for helping to maintain viable agricultural communities where the pressure to convert agricultural lands to residential use is growing day by day. We urge you to consider the positive impact of this relatively small but incredibly important program as you assemble your recommendations for the next Farm Bill.

On behalf of the Trust for Public Land, thank you for the opportunity to share our views with you today.

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